Gunai language

The **Gunai** language (/ˈgʌnaɪ/ *GUN-eye*, also spelt **Gunnai**, **Ganai**, **Gaanay**, **Kurnai**, **Kurnay** /ˈkɜːrnaɪ/ *KUR-nye*) is an Australian aboriginal dialect cluster of the Gunai people in Gippsland in south-east Victoria. **Bidhawal** (**Birrdhawal**) was either a divergent dialect or a closely related language.[4]

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Gunai
Gaanay
Kannai
Region — Gippsland, Victoria, Australia
Ethnicity — Gunai (Brabiralung, Braiakaulung, Bratauolung, Krauatungalung, Tatungalung), Bidhawal
Native speakers — 4 (2016 census)[1]
Language family — Pama–Nyungan ▪ Gippsland ▪ **Gunai**
Dialects — Muk-thang Nulit Thangquai Bidhawal[2] (Birrdhawal)
Language codes
ISO 639-3 — Either: `unn` – Kurnai `ihw` – Bidhawal
Glottolog — `gana1279 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/gana1279)`[3]
AIATSIS[4] — `S68 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/S68)` Gunnai (cover term), `S49 (https://collection.aiatsis.gov.au/austlang/language/S49)` Bida

Varieties

Gunai means 'man'. The language had no traditional name, but each of its dialects was referred to separately.

In a 1996 report to the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, Clark refers to five Gunai dialects: *Brabralung*, *Braiakalung*, *Bratualung*, *Krauatungalung* and *Tatungalung*.[5]

- *Brabralung* (*Bra* = man, *lung* = belonging to) located in central Gippsland.
- *Braiakalung* (*Bra* = Man, *ak* = west, *lung* = belonging to) located around Sale through to the mountains.
- *Bratualung* (men belonging to this place which have fire; *Bra* = men, *Taua* or *towera* = fire, *lung* = belonging to) located in South Gippsland.
- *Krauatungalung* (*Kraut* = east, *lung* = belonging to) located eastwards to the Snowy River.
- *Tatungalung* (*tat* = sea, *lung* = belonging to) located in the coast area between Lake King and Lake Wellington.[6]

Gunai dialects have been confused with Muk-thang/Bidhawal; there appear to be two distinct languages here, but it's not clear which variety belongs to which.[4][7]

Phonology

Like other Victorian languages, Gunai allowed initial ⟨l⟩ in its words. However, it also allowed initial ⟨rr⟩, and well as the clusters ⟨gr⟩ (⟨kr⟩) and ⟨br⟩ (⟨pr⟩). This is quite unusual for an Australian language, and the same pattern was found in the Tasmanian languages across Bass Strait.

Sketch Map of Gippsland - showing approximately the Positions of the Clans of the Kurnai Tribe.

Consonants

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar
Stop	p/b	t̪/d̪	t/d	ʈ/ɖ	c/ɟ	k/g
Nasal	m	n̪	n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ
Rhotic			r			
Lateral			l			
Approximant	w			ɻ	j	

[8][9]

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

Revival

Since the early 1990s, the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) organisation, established the Yirruk-Tinnor Gunnai/Kŭrnai language program which focused on reviving and reclaiming the Gunnai language of Gippsland. Doris Paton, Coordinator of the Program and Lynnette Solomon-Dent, Language worker and consultant are involved in the program. They have been responsible for developing a number of resource materials to support and educate further knowledge of the Gunnai language and Culture. Lynnette Solomon-Dent co-wrote with Christina Eira the VACL Linguist, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) *Aboriginal Languages, cultures and reclamation in Victorian schools:* standards P-10 and protocols and were involved in the VCE Revival and Reclamation Study. These teaching documents and resources are collectively used to educate school aged children P-10, VCE, higher learning institutions and the Aboriginal community members, to further their knowledge and allow community members to continue to educate future generations.[10]

Placenames possibly derived from the Gunai language

A number of placenames in Gunai country feature the ending *-munjie*, meaning "place".

Placename	Origin
Boolarra	Thought to mean "plenty".[11]
Briagolong	From the name of the Braiakulung clan.
Buchan	From *Bukkan-munjie*, meaning "place of the bag".
Croajingolong National Park	From the name of the Krauatungulung clan.
Moe	From the term *Mouay* meaning "swamp", in reference to the large swamp present before being drained by early European settlers.
Moondarra	"Thunder"
Morwell	Allegedly the anglicised form of the Gunai words *more willie* meaning "woolly possum".[12] However, other sources debate this, as the Gunai word for possum was *wadthan*, as opposed to *wille* or *wollert* in Kulin languages further west.[13]
Traralgon	Origin uncertain. It is popularly believed to be derived from words *tarra* meaning "river" and *algon* meaning "little fish". However, these words are not reflected in modern linguists' knowledge of the Gunai language, where, for example, the word for river is *wun wun* or *wurn wurn*.[14]
Wy Yung	Some sources give spoonbill,[15] others a type of duck.[16]
Yallourn	Possibly from a term for "brown fire".[17]
Yarram	Possibly from a term *Yarraam Yarraam* meaning "plenty of water".
Yinnar	Thought to be from the word for "woman".[18]

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